

# Webster to quit as CIA chief

## White House criticism of gulf role is reported

By Stephen Kurkjian  
GLOBE STAFF

WASHINGTON - William H. Webster, credited with restoring the reputation of the Central Intelligence Agency following the controversial tenure of William Casey, unexpectedly announced yesterday that he will resign as the agency's director.

Despite reports that Bush has been disgruntled with the agency's record in predicting events in Iraq and Panama and that he wanted the chance to name his own CIA director, Bush went out of his way to applaud Webster at yesterday's announcement.

"Bill has brought an integrity, an effectiveness and an insight to the many intelligence-gathering operations of this nation. He has done a superb job," Bush said.

Speculation on Webster's successor centered on Robert Gates, deputy director of the National Security Council, and James Lilley, a former CIA case officer and friend of the president's who is ending his job as ambassador to China this week.

According to Vincent Cannistraro, former deputy director for counterintelligence for the CIA, Lilley holds the inside track on the nomination, and the White House began a background check on him last month.

Also mentioned as possible candidates are Brent Scowcroft, the national security adviser, and Bobby Ray Inman, a former CIA deputy director and now a member of Bush's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board.

According to associates, Webster made the decision to resign last week and informed Bush last Thursday. The associates said that Webster, 67, is eager to enter private law practice after 26 years of public service, including stints as a US district judge and FBI director.

Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont, a former vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said Webster succeeded in regaining the agency's public credibility, which was badly tarnished by such Casey-orchestrated

operations as the mining of Nicaraguan harbors and the deal to sell arms to Iran and assist the contras without telling Congress.

"He came in at probably the most difficult time in the agency's history, when its relations with Congress were at a complete stalemate," the Democrat said. "But he restored the trust between the two branches."

When he was named by President Reagan in 1987, Webster pledged to remove himself as a policy adviser to the Oval Office. By distancing himself from that role, Webster placed himself and the agency too much on the outside of White House decisions, critics contended.

In his new book "The Commanders," Bob Woodward, the Washington Post editor, writes that Webster "did not usually receive a lot of attention" at the White House strategy sessions during the Gulf War because most senior officials felt he was just rehashing agency reports.

The chief criticism of Webster's tenure, however, stems from the agency's lack of intelligence from agents in many Third World regions. For example, while the CIA expressed concern about Saddam Hussein's bellicose positioning of his forces, it did not warn that Iraq was going to invade Kuwait until a day or two before.

In addition, Webster's critics inside the White House blamed him when CIA operatives in Panama refused to assist forces to overthrow Manuel Noriega out of fear it might result in Noriega being killed. Such a death might have provoked questions about whether the US ban on killing foreign leaders had been violated.

Sen. William Cohen of Maine, who served as vice chairman of the Intelligence Committee, said that although Webster's resignation will allow Bush to name his own person to the job, which Bush himself held in 1975-1976, he hopes the new director will maintain his independence from White House policy-making. Mixing the two functions, Cohen said, raises the risk of engaging in covert operations that have not been reviewed by Congress.

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